Fall 2014 Undergraduate Student Survey: Highlights

The Undergraduate Student Survey has been conducted at Simon Fraser University every Fall semester since 1992¹ (except in 2002). This annual survey provides essential feedback on the academic experiences and concerns of our undergraduate students. Every year, the survey asks students about their experiences with course availability at SFU, as well as a range of other topics that change from year to year. This year's topics included teaching and curriculum and general and academic services, including a section on SFU’s learning management system, Canvas.

A total of 5,081 students participated in this year’s survey, yielding an overall response rate of 20.9%. Highlights of the survey results are presented here. Statistics provided in this summary and in the full report are estimates based on survey respondents. Assuming that the sample is representative, proportions calculated on all respondents are accurate within ±1.3%², 19 times out of 20. The full report is available on the Institutional Research and Planning web-site: http://www.sfu.ca/irp/surveys/ugss.html

General Experience

- 90% of respondents are satisfied with their general SFU experience.
- When students were asked what single thing SFU could do to improve their experience here, the most common responses were:
  - improve student life,
  - improve facilities, and
  - improve course availability, variety and scheduling.

If SFU could do one thing to improve your experience here, what would it be? (Top 10 Suggestions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Life/Campus Community</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Availability, Variety and Scheduling</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program/Course Curriculum and Format</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors and T.A.s</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Administration</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition/Fees and Financial Aid</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/Water</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ It should be noted that a change in methodology, from in-class paper survey to online survey, was instituted in 2006. The paper surveys, administered to a random sample of classes, resulted in a “captive audience” and high response rates. In contrast, the online surveys, usually administered to the entire SFU undergraduate student population, result in larger samples but lower response rates, which could make the results less generalizable. Measures were taken to reduce potential biases resulting from a lower response rate.

² Note that this margin of error does not control for multiple comparisons. Survey research should be considered exploratory, and definitive conclusions must be drawn with caution.
Course Availability

- This year’s course availability results were similar to the 2013 results. Differences were not statistically significant.

- **NUMBER of Courses**: 83% of respondents were able to register in the number of courses they wanted this fall, versus 82% last fall.

- **SPECIFIC Courses**: 58% were able to register in all of the specific courses they wanted to take this term. This is the same as last year’s rate.

- **REQUIRED Courses**: 67% were able to register in all of the REQUIRED courses they wanted this term. This is the same as last year’s rate.

  - Registration difficulty in required courses was most often due to:
    - full classes,
    - scheduling conflicts,
    - courses not being offered this term, and
    - spaces being reserved for other students.

- **Credential Completion Time**: 64% of respondents reported that it is taking them longer than expected to complete their credential. This is a statistically significant increase from last year’s rate of 57%. This increase does not reflect a drop in the percentage of respondents expecting to complete on time, but rather a shift away from respondents saying that they don’t know.

  - Commonly cited reasons for delay include:
    - course availability issues (e.g. full courses, schedule conflicts, courses not offered, etc.; 51% of delayed respondents cited this cause, down from 53% last year),
    - students choosing to reduce their course load (41%, down from 42% last year), and
    - working in a job, outside of co-op (33%, up from 32% last year).

  - Rates of delayed completion are highest in the Faculty of Health Sciences (70%) and the Faculty of Science (69%), and lowest in the Faculty of Education (39%).

- **Trends**: While course availability has improved in the past few years, it is still an issue, with about one third of respondents unable to register in their required courses in recent fall terms.
• **Satisfaction with Course Availability:**
  - Satisfaction with course availability decreases as course level increases.
    - Satisfaction with the availability of courses at all year levels has increased by 3-8% from last year. These are statistically significant increases.
    - Satisfaction with the availability of 400-level courses is similar across faculties, with the exception of being substantially higher among respondents in Education (EDUC; this is a statistically significant difference).
  - 69-77% of respondents are satisfied with course scheduling and the location (campus) of courses offered.
  - 59-64% are satisfied with available registration spots in courses (course capacity), the variety of distance/online courses offered, and course frequency.

### Satisfaction with Course Availability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>100-Level Courses</th>
<th>200-Level Courses</th>
<th>300-Level Courses</th>
<th>400-Level Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location of courses offered</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling of classes</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available registration spots in courses</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of distance/online courses</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often each course is offered</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching and Curriculum

- **Quality of Teaching:** 87% of respondents are satisfied with the quality of teaching at SFU.

- **Student Learning Outcomes:** Students were asked what qualities, skills or experiences they think an SFU graduate should have. Students could select up to three choices, and top choices are displayed in the graph below. Among the top five selected skills:
  - 88% of respondents are satisfied that SFU is equipping them with critical thinking skills,
  - 74% are satisfied that SFU is preparing them to apply the knowledge and methods they have learned,
  - 75% are satisfied that SFU is providing opportunities for “learning through experience”,
  - 89% are satisfied that SFU is giving them a solid foundation in their academic discipline, and
  - 71% are satisfied that SFU is developing their oral communication skills.

![Graph of Student Learning Outcomes](image)

- **WQB Courses:** Just over half of this year’s respondents agreed that these courses produce the benefits for which they were designed (61% agreement for “W” courses, 62% for “Q” courses, and 67% for “B” courses).

![Graph of WQB Courses](image)

- **Research with Faculty Members:** 19% of respondents considered to be in fourth year or higher (based on credits completed and basis of admission) said that they have worked within a faculty member’s research team, outside of coursework.
Language Skills and Support

- **English Language Skills:**
  - 88% of respondents speak some English at home, with 41% speaking only English at home.
  - 59% speak at least one non-English language at home, and 12% speak no English at home.
  - 41% were identified as English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. Among these students, 27% indicated that they speak no English at home.
  - 46% of respondents said that they sometimes struggle in their classes because of their instructors’ English language skills.
  - 13% of respondents felt they would perform better in their classes if they had English language support.
  - 26% of respondents have used English-language support services at SFU, and 43% of those respondents are very/somewhat satisfied with these services.

Services

- **Advising:** 79% of respondents have used academic advising services at SFU, and of those who have used these services, 75% are very/somewhat satisfied.
- **Library:** 87% of respondents have used the Library, and 90% of those respondents are satisfied with this service.
- **Technology Services:** 94% of respondents have used technology services on campus (e.g. wifi, mySFU, computer support, etc.), and 79% of those respondents are satisfied with these services.
- **Food:** 90% of respondents have used the food services on campus, and of those respondents, 74% are very/somewhat satisfied.
- **Canvas:** 98% of respondents have used Canvas in an SFU course, and 35% would be interested in using Canvas for non-course activities, such as for student clubs.
- **Health and Wellness:** 46-49% of respondents agree that it is easy to make meaningful social connections with others at SFU and that SFU provides them with a supportive environment that reduces unnecessary personal and academic stress.

### Percent Satisfaction with Academic Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library (other than SLC)</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning Commons (SLC)</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Integrated Learning (i.e. co-op)</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-Language support services</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General

- **Student Goals:** Students were asked to indicate what they were hoping to get out of their education when they decided to come to SFU. Students could select up to three choices, and top choices are displayed in the graph below. Respondents indicated that getting a good job was their top priority.
• **Engagement at SFU:** Students were asked about their participation in various activities at SFU over the course of their education here. Among respondents:
  - 45% have participated in an SFU club, with an additional 25% planning to participate.
  - 35% have participated in a department, program, or faculty event, while 17% indicated that they were unaware of such events.
  - 16-18% have participated in co-op, an SFU volunteer program, or a class project involving a community or business organization.
    - 18-46% more said they would like to participate in these experiences.
  - 9% have participated in student government, with an additional 15% indicating that they are interested in participating, and 60% saying they are not interested in participating.
  - 3-7% have participated in work-study, international exchange/study abroad, or field schools.
    - An additional 19-34% said they were planning to participate in these programs.
    - 29% of respondents indicated that they were not aware of field schools at SFU.

• **Engagement in the Community:** Students were asked about their engagement in their local community and in an international setting in the past year.
  - 71% of respondents participated in volunteer work in their local community, compared to 14% in an international setting.
  - 43-45% of respondents engaged in humanitarian and civic activities in their local community, vs. 9-14% internationally.
  - 30% engaged in environmental advocacy locally, vs. 7% internationally, and
  - 18-22% engaged locally in social justice activities and in community service work that made use of their SFU education, compared to 4-9% internationally.

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**Engagement in Local and International Settings over the past Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Local Setting</th>
<th>International Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any VOLUNTEER work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMANITARIAN efforts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIVIC activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENTAL advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL JUSTICE activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service work that made use of your SFU education</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• **Employment:** Over half (53%) of respondents are currently employed or self-employed. Among these:
  - 11% work 30 hours or more per week in a paid job,
  - 63% work 10-29 hours per week, and
  - 26% work less than 10 hours per week.

**Recommendations**

- **Student Life/Campus Community:** Students continue to request improvements to student life and the campus community, such as holding more social events, including parties and group activities.

- **Facilities:** Based on comments received, student satisfaction with facilities could be further improved by:
  - continuing to improve and increase the number of study spaces on campus,
  - continuing to repair and improve the washrooms, as well as cleaning them more frequently,
  - improving the outdoor shelters and walkways, along with the drainage systems,
  - improving the heating and cooling of SFU buildings, and
  - continuing to renovate and repair buildings, such as fixing the broken chairs and desks in classrooms.

- **Course Availability and Scheduling:** Student responses suggest the need for continued effort to:
  - increase the frequency of courses, especially required courses,
  - increase the number of evening and online courses, and
  - increase the number of courses offered at the Surrey campus.

- **Policies and Services:** Some additional student suggestions over the last few years for improving their experience at SFU include:
  - providing more advertising about available services,
  - improving transportation service and parking availability,
  - increasing the amount of practical/hands-on experience in courses,
  - improving the registration priority system,
  - improving the English-language skills of instructors and TAs,
  - lowering tuition and fees, and/or improving financial aid,
  - continuing to improve food quality while keeping prices low,
  - improving access to wi-fi and power outlets,
  - continuing to improve the SFU website, enrollment system, and online course systems, and
  - improving academic advising.